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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 001546

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [TH](#) [TRT](#)

SUBJECT: DELPHIC ORACLES AND BLACK MAGIC - THAILAND UPDATE
MARCH 13

REF: A. BANGKOK 01537 (OPPOSITION SELLS)

[B](#). BANGKOK 01445 (MORE CALLS FOR THAKSIN'S
RESIGNATION)

[C](#). BANGKOK 01475 (THAI SNAP REGISTRATION ENDS)

[D](#). BANGKOK 00959 (CONSTITUTIONAL COURT REJECTS
SENATORS' BID TO DISQUALIFY THAKSIN)

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Alex A. Arvizu, reason 1.4 (b) (d)

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: All TV stations, at the request of the Palace, ran film of the King's May 1992 meeting with General Suchinda and protest leader Chamlong, in which the King called on them to avoid confrontation and find a peaceful solution. In the wake of the Sunday evening broadcast, there have been renewed calls for resolution of the current conflict through negotiations, perhaps mediated by Privy Councillor Prem. Last Friday, Thaksin made his case to the public in a TV interview, meeting with only moderate success. Meanwhile, the exposure of fraudulent candidates and a technical problem with the TRT party list demonstrate that there may be problems seating all 500 members of the new Parliament if elections take place. A Constitutional Court judge told us that his court was wrong not to have taken the Shin Corp case and reviewed the PM's involvement in the sale. Pro-Thaksin farmers on tractors are heading for Government House for a possible confrontation with anti-Thaksin demonstrators; the demonstrators may head them off at the pass by holding their protest march earlier. End summary.

THE KING SPEAKS - SORT OF

[2](#). (C) By far the biggest recent development was the unannounced broadcast on all TV stations Sunday evening at 8pm showing film of the iconic intervention of the King following the 1992 pro-democracy demonstrations. A broadcaster announced that, "As the current situation has led to the existence of a large diversity of different conflicting opinions, several groups in the society are worried that this may lead to unrest in the country. The TV Pool of Thailand deems it appropriate to present His Majesty the King's advice given on 20 May 1992 to serve as a reminder for consideration for all parties and individuals." There follows the King's advice to both General Suchinda and the protesters (led then, as they are today, by Chamlong Srimuang) to avoid confrontation and violence. In 1992, the King offered the Privy Council and particularly General Prem Tinsulanonda as "senior figures ready to give advice with neutrality." The clip was replayed on the Monday morning news on several channels as well.

[3](#). (C) The King's principal private secretary, Asa Sarasin, told the Ambassador that the King himself ordered the film to be shown in order to encourage a peaceful resolution to the current political conflict. Although Asa says the intent of the broadcast was not to favor either side, the initial analysis is that it works against the Prime Minister, since everyone knows that part of the solution in 1992 was for the PM under siege to step down. This was the view expressed to DCM by a military aide of Privy Councillor General Suryayud Chulanont.

[4](#). (C) In the wake of this broadcast, there have been renewed calls for both sides to agree to meet and talk, as well as calls for General Prem to act as mediator. The latest idea circulating follows the outlines of the plan advocated by the National Police spokesman last week. Speaking in his personal capacity, the spokesman said that each side should take "one step back." Under this scenario, Thaksin would agree not to be PM in the next Parliament, no matter how the voting went, and the opposition parties would agree to participate in elections, which would be rescheduled to allow them to choose candidates and register. So far, however, there has been no sign of real progress in settling up a meeting.

THAKSIN SPEAKS -- I AM NOT A CROOK

[5](#). (C) Before the Palace's unexpected flashback, Thaksin's

campaign was dominating the press. On Friday, March 10, he gave an interview in which he justified the sale of Shin Corp and his decision to dissolve the Parliament, among other difficult questions. The ABAC poll (considered to be as reliable a poll as Thailand has) reported an even split among viewers in response to several of the issues. 46 percent thought Thaksin's explanation of the share of Shin Corp was "very clear" as opposed to 42 percent who thought it wasn't. About 44 percent agreed with his explanation on his resignation, while 33 percent did not accept his arguments and 23 percent had no view. 68 percent agreed with Thaksin's explanation that he had set such a short term for the new elections in order to allow time for the new government to be set up before the King's celebration in June. Several observers commented on how stressed the PM appeared to be during the interview. The grilling he got from the interviewer is further evidence of the increased openness of the broadcast media. (Ref A)

16. (C) The PM also assembled civil servants on Friday, apparently to remind them of their duty to be neutral and implement the policies of the current administration until a new government is formed. Several sources have confirmed that Thaksin referred to reports that his enemies were using voodoo and black magic against him, an interjection that one attendee described as "inappropriate."

THE MONK SPEAKS - I AM NOT A CANDIDATE

17. (C) The Thai constitution and electoral law were meant for genuine multi-party contests. The current election is not quite a one horse race -- more like one horse and seven gerbils. Thai Rak Thai's goal is to avoid various landmines in the law that might leave some seats unfilled and, for all practical purposes, unfillable. It is generally assumed that all 500 seats must be filled before the new Parliament can sit and elect a new government. Various technical problems now cropping up are introducing additional speculation and intrigue (Ref C).

18. (C) Number 93 on the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party list of 100 has resigned from the party and entered the monastery. The (former) candidate told the press that he had done this to "unlock the political gridlock and cause the April 2 election to be canceled, so that everyone would negotiate." Dr. Premasak, now Phra (Monk) Premasak, intends to achieve this by leaving TRT with only 99 people on its "party list." TRT is widely expected to win all 100 seats awarded on the basis of the party list vote; the other parties running cannot be expected to get the required 5 percent of the vote nationwide, even under the current circumstances, and thus would not get any of the 100 party list seats. Therefore, according to Monk Premasak and some other analysts, there will be an unavoidable deadlock if elections take place, as TRT will not have 100 bodies to fill its 100 seats.

19. (C) Comment: We're not certain that Monk Premasak's analysis is correct. Since the Electoral Commission (EC) does not finish its vetting of candidates until Wednesday, we are not certain that TRT wouldn't get a last chance to replace the disqualified candidate under these circumstances. The Electoral Commission is also hinting that it might need to find some way to resolve the various "incomplete Parliament" scenarios. However, this very public defection by yet another TRT member is more sobering news for PM Thaksin. End Comment.

110. (SBU) There are also numerous press reports of fraudulent candidates in the constituency races. Three of these candidates came forward over the weekend and admitted that they had been paid 30,000 baht each to claim to be members of the Democratic Progressive Party and run in the contest in the mid-South province of Trang. They said that they did not know the party affiliation of the person who paid them to run. They reportedly came forward when they became concerned that they might be breaking the law.

THE JUDGE SPEAKS -- COURT WHIFFED ON SHIN CORP

11. (C) We spoke to one of the Constitutional Court judges who voted against Thaksin in the case submitted by 28 senators requesting review the legality of the Shin Corp sale (ref D). Judge Apai said that the six judges who voted to accept the petition against the PM felt strongly that the Court should have taken the case and used its authority to investigate the allegations that Thaksin had maintained improper control over Shin Corp and was involved in its sale. The judge denied, however, that any of the justices on the court had been bribed or otherwise subject to undue influence. The judge said that this case came under the jurisdiction of the Constitutional Court and no other court would be able to accept this case. (Note: we believe that this restriction applies primarily to the issue he mentioned -- whether Thaksin controlled the Shin Corp shares sold,

which would have violated Article 209 of the Constitution. Other aspects of the sale could conceivably be examined by other courts. However, the Constitutional Court's decision to take a pass on the case was the final straw for many of the protesters, who decided that there was no legal recourse possible to hold the PM accountable to the law. End note.)
MEANWHILE, ON SANAM LUANG

12. (C) Press reports say that at least several hundred farmers from TRT strongholds in northeast Thailand are riding on their tractors to Bangkok, planning to surround Government House and confront the anti-Thaksin demonstrators. The protesters on Sanam Luang planned to march on Government House at 7:00 Tuesday morning. The protesters are considering moving up the time of their march and going this evening, in order to complete the protest there before the tractors arrive. Thaksin has already announced he won't be at Government House Tuesday morning for the Cabinet meeting -- he'll be traveling in the northeast and will teleconference with the cabinet.

COMMENT

13. (C) The Palace's tentative intervention is being widely viewed mainly as a call for negotiations and moderation. Thaksin supporters can claim that the message is aimed primarily at protest leader Chamlong, whereas others interpret the broadcast as a call for Thaksin to step down (i.e., the "whisper in the ear.") The broadcast message is very much the King's preferred style, vague enough to be interpreted in different ways by different audiences. Many observers see recent developments such as this ratcheting up the pressure on Thaksin to be more forthcoming in trying to negotiate a way out the impasse. He believes he's doing plenty, but it doesn't seem to be enough. End comment.

BOYCE